

NR

CAR-2  
Oak Lawn or White Hall  
Ridgely  
Private

Circa 1783

Oak Lawn stands upon a wide expanse of farm land north of Ridgely. It was constructed around 1783 by Benjamin Sylvester, a large land holder of the revolutionary period. He had this plantation resurveyed in 1790 as White Hall.

Most noteworthy of the architectural features of the dwelling is the brick arched colonnade or passage between the kitchen and main house. Few alterations have occurred in the well-built mansion, except for the removal of a secondary stair from the southwest room. This latter feature was similar to Willow Grove, also in Caroline County. Its interior is noted for its original bold woodwork and chinese trellis stair and the four room plan.

Benjamin Sylvester continued acquiring land until his death in 1795. It passed to his daughter and her children including the property called the Plains, now the Benedictine School.

In the mid-19th century, Oak Lawn was owned by Greenbury Ridgely, the founder of the town of Ridgely. Subsequent owners included John Dawson (1871-1906), John K. Lynch (1910-1927), and Ambrose Lucas (1927-1947), whose heirs still own the land.

On the property is also the remains of a brick barn which was standing at the time of the Federal Direct Tax of 1798.

Oak Lawn is on the National Register.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:

Maryland 060000-204

COUNTY:

Caroline CAR-2 NR

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE

## 1. NAME

COMMON:

Oak Lawn

CAR 2

AND/OR HISTORIC:

White Hall, Oakland, Dawson Farm

## 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

2.8 miles north of Ridgely on the west side of Maryland

Route 312

CITY OR TOWN:

Ridgely

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:

First

STATE

Maryland

CODE

24

COUNTY:

Caroline

CODE

011

## 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) restoration planned; vacant

## 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:

Mrs. Charles (Edith D.) Connolly

STREET AND NUMBER:

Box 324

CITY OR TOWN:

Queen Anne

STATE:

Maryland 31657 24

CODE

## 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Caroline County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

Denton

STATE:

Maryland

CODE

24

## 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:

☐ Federal☐ State☐ County☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Maryland

COUNTY: Caroline

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

## 7. DESCRIPTION

(Check One)

CONDITION

☐ Excellent☐ Good☐ Fair☒ Deteriorated☐ Ruins☐ Unexposed

(Check One)

☐ Altered☒ Unaltered

(Check One)

☐ Moved☒ Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located 2.8 miles north of Ridgely, Maryland, on the west side of Maryland Route 312, Oak Lawn is a large rectangular 2 1/2 story brick structure with a brick arcade and two-story kitchen extending from the back. The main house was erected in 1783 and the kitchen and arcade were added later, some time before 1798. The east facade of the main block, laid in all header bond (unusual in Eastern Shore buildings) without a water table, is five bays long with a central door of eight panels. Two small bull's-eyes in the top two panels allow light into the hall. Common bond was used throughout the rest of the structure. A belt course three bricks wide extends around the house.

A two-story porch on the east facade was built in two stages during the nineteenth century. Its first floor is believed to date from the third quarter of the century. It is constructed in a highly decorative style with jigsaw brackets that suggest three arches across the front. The gallery was added later and a door was adapted from a previous window opening located immediately above the first floor entrance. This second-floor gallery was removed in July 1974, and the lower section roofed to form a one-story porch.

The cornice extends across both the front (east) and rear (west) of the house and is composed of courses of large ogee-shaped modillions, wall of Troy molding, and carved egg and dart molding. The rear cornice lacks the lower, classically inspired moldings, but does continue the use of carved modillion blocks. The ridge of the main gable roof run north-south and there are three pedimented dormers on both the front and rear slopes. Two small four-pane casements flank a round recessed panel in the south end gable of the main block which bears the initials "B S" and the date 1783 etched in plaster.

The arcade extends from the north side of the west facade. It has four brick arches supported by three brick piers on the south side; in its north wall is a single, eight-panel door. In the end of the arcade that adjoins the kitchen is a small room with shelves which formerly had a window and possibly was used as a small pantry or larder. The three-bay-long kitchen wing has only one room on the first floor. A huge arched fireplace in a ruinous condition stands at the north end. A small enclosed stair ascends to the second floor on the north side of the chimney. While there are now two tiny rooms and a hall on the second floor, it was originally one room with a small fireplace at its west end. Framing one side of the open stairwell is a Chinese trellis balustrade.

The interior of both floors of the main portion of the house is composed of a central stair hall with two rooms on each side. The two east rooms on the first floor have raised

(See continuation sheet No. 1)

CAR-2

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE

CAR-2

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Pre-Columbian☐ 15th Century☒ 18th Century☐ 20th Century☐ 15th Century☐ 17th Century☐ 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1783

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Aboriginal☐ Education☐ Political☐ Urban Planning☐ Prehistoric☐ Engineering☐ Religion/Phil.☒ Other (Specify)☐ Historic☐ Industry

osophy

local

☐ Agriculture☐ Invention☐ Science

history

☒ Architecture☐ Landscape☐ Sculpture☐ Art

Architecture

☐ Social/Human-☐ Commerce☐ Literature

itarian

☐ Communications☐ Military☐ Theater☐ Conservation☐ Music☐ Transportation

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Oak Lawn is a fine example of a small Eastern Shore Maryland plantation house of the late eighteenth century. Built in 1783 by Benjamin Sylvester, a large landowner and planter, the house still contains all of its original woodwork. There are stair railings done in a local interpretation of the Chinese Chippendale style in both the main house and the kitchen wing. The arcade which joins the house and kitchen is one of only a few arcades known in Maryland's extant early buildings, but the others have been changed while the one at Oak Lawn remains unaltered.

Benjamin Sylvester was a man representative of that class of Maryland planters who, though not of the elite, made a good living and practiced such of those graces of aristocratic life as they could afford. In the 1750's, this group would have consisted of a little less than one-third of Maryland's planters.<sup>1</sup> By the 1780's when Oak Lawn was built, they probably constituted a somewhat larger percentage of the population.

The families that fell into this category generally had a fair number of slaves and numerous cattle and horses. Their houses were of a good size, though not as large as the mansions of the truly wealthy. Because possession of much land was a symbol of success and status, they acquired as much of it as they could.<sup>2</sup> In 1783, the year he built Oak Lawn, then called White Hall, Benjamin Sylvester owned 1,145 acres of land and had twenty slaves. He had only a small number of horses and cattle, but increased this number in the next twelve years before his death. In his will he mentions six horses, twenty head of cattle, and twenty head of sheep. In 1790, thirty-eight slaves are listed for him in the U.S. Census.

Many of the poorer families lived in very small houses of only one or two rooms in the eighteenth century,<sup>3</sup> thus Oak Lawn is quite a large house for this period. Compared

<sup>1</sup>Aubrey C. Land, "Planters of Colonial Maryland," Maryland Historical Magazine, LXVII (Summer, 1972), 116.

<sup>2</sup>Louis B. Wright, The Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607-1763. (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 3-4.

<sup>3</sup>Land, p. 122.

(See continuation sheet No. 1)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) #1

STATE	
Maryland	
COUNTY	
Caroline	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

Oak Lawn

7. DESCRIPTION, continued

panel wainscoting and window shutters. All of the rooms have wide mantels around the diagonally placed fireplaces. The mantel in the southeast room is perhaps the best designed of these four on the first floor, having a crossetted surround, carved console brackets on the frieze and a blocked, highly decorated cornice shelf. The hall is divided by a transverse elliptical arch on fluted pilasters. The stairs leading to the second floor are at the west end of the hall. The design of the Chinese trellis balustrade is somewhat more bulky in appearance than that of the kitchen chamber, perhaps attributable to the steep incline of the stair and the thickness of the trellis slats.

In the northwest corner of the southwest first floor room stood an auxiliary stair leading from the attic to the second floor. This stair was apparently removed about 1910 when a bathroom was installed in a portion of the second floor chamber. The rooms upstairs are finished in simple woodwork fashioned in a basic Federal style.

Under the main section of the house is a full basement of four rooms with brick partition walls and floors. The attic is finished, containing three large rooms with plastered walls.

Also on the property is a brick carriage house in poor condition, later altered when framed walls were built to replace some of the brick walls which had collapsed. This building is believed to be that mentioned in the 1798 tax assessment of the property.

8. SIGNIFICANCE, continued

to the holdings of the wealthiest early planter families, such as the Carrolls and Dulanys in Maryland, Sylvester's estate may not seem very great. But in contrast to the meagre existence of the majority of the farming population eked out of the soil, the Sylvesters were very well off indeed.

When Benjamin Sylvester died in 1795, he left Oak Lawn to his daughter Martha, wife of Isaac Purnell. Under their supervision, the plantation prospered further. In 1798, sixty-six slaves lived at Oak Lawn. Purnell owned a total of just over 4,000 acres of land and half a dozen small dwelling houses. The value assigned to the large house at White Hall by the tax assessor was \$1,300, one of the few homes to be assessed at over one thousand dollars in Caroline County.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Federal Tax Assessment of 1798, records for Caroline County, Maryland, Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

(See continuation sheet No. 620, 921-724)



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet) #2

STATE Maryland	
COUNTY Caroline	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Number all entries)

Oak Lawn

The Purnells' son Frederick owned Oak Lawn until 1833 when he sold it to Abraham Jump, Jr., another well-known citizen of the county.

In 1853, the Reverend Greenbury W. Ridgely purchased Oak Lawn and 800 acres surrounding it for \$8,000. Born in Kentucky, Rev. Ridgely attended law school in Connecticut and studied law on Maryland's Western Shore where he became a member of the Maryland bar. He practiced law for a time with Henry Clay, but left to attend the Theological Seminary at Princeton. He was rector at Protestant Episcopal churches in Newtown and Chester in Pennsylvania. In 1853, he moved to Caroline County where he purchased several thousand acres of land. He conducted services in many places in the county which had no church nearby but was not assigned to a parish.<sup>5</sup>

The town of Ridgely was founded in 1867 as a stop on the Queenstown and Harrington Railroad. It was planned by several friends of Rev. Ridgely's. He cooperated with them in selling some of his land for the city site as well as in other ways, and in turn these men named the town after him. When the railroad venture did not succeed, the town was built anyway by a real estate firm.<sup>6</sup>

The Rev. Ridgely owned Oak Lawn for eight years and it was he who first named it Oak Lawn, or Oakland as it was written in the deeds until 1927. His son, William S. Ridgely, owned the house until 1871.

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<sup>5</sup>Edward M. Noble and others, History of Caroline County, Maryland, from its Beginnings. (Reprint of 1920 ed.; Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1971), p. 302.

<sup>6</sup>Noble, pp. 299-300.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES, continued

Works Progress Administration Writers' Program. Maryland, A Guide to the Old Line State. American Guide Series. Reprint of 1940 ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Deeds, wills, records of Federal Tax Assessment of 1798 for Caroline County, and other records in the Caroline County Courthouse, Denton, Maryland, and the Hall of Records, Annapolis, Maryland.

Forman, H. Chandlee. Old Buildings, Gardens and Furniture in Tidewater Maryland. Cambridge, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1967.

Noble, Edward M., and others. History of Caroline County, Maryland, from its Beginning. Reprint of 1920 ed.

Baltimore: Regional Publishing Company, 1971.

## 10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

(See continuation sheet)

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	LATITUDE		LONGITUDE
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	38° 58' 55"	75° 53' 10"	0		
NE	38° 58' 58"	75° 52' 33"			
SE	38° 58' 48"	75° 52' 33"			
SW	38° 58' 45"	75° 53' 08"			

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 72 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

## 11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:	
Richard Rivoire; Pamela James, Research Assistant; Michael Bourne	
ORGANIZATION	DATE
Maryland Historical Trust	8/1/74
STREET AND NUMBER:	
2525 Riva Road	
CITY OR TOWN:	STATE
Annapolis	Maryland
	CODE
	24

## 12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

## NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National ☐ State ☐ Local ☐

me \_\_\_\_\_  
Orlando Ridout IV  
Title State Historic Preservation  
Officer

Date

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Keeper of The National Register

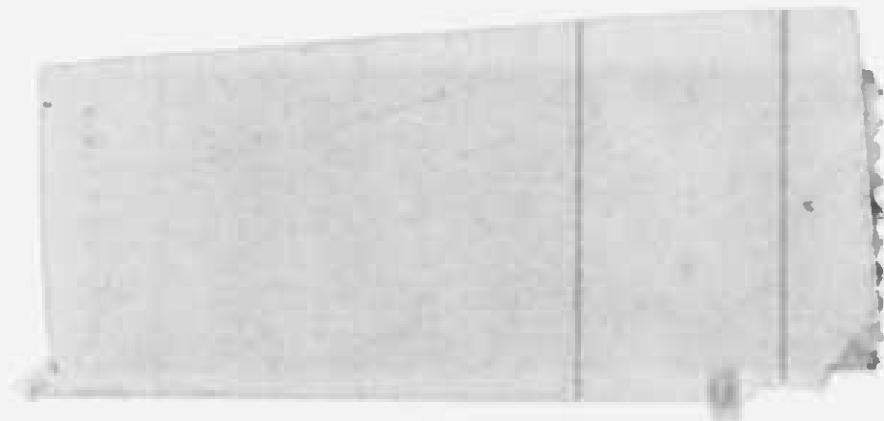
Date

SEE INSTRUCTIONS





Oak lawn - CAR - 2

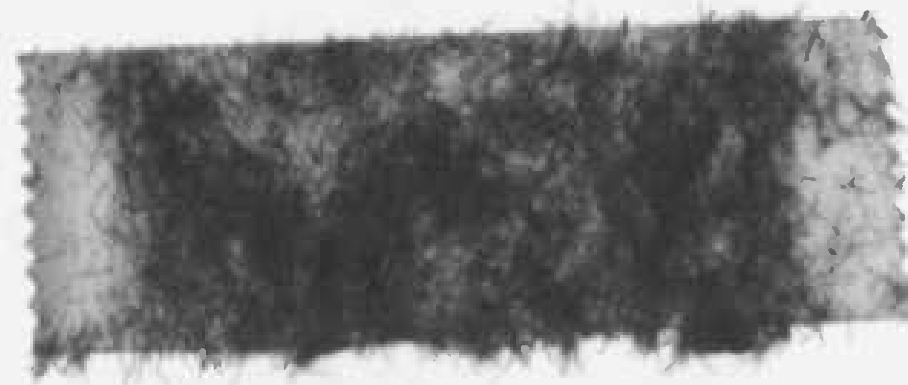


606-36



Oak - lawn -

CAR - 2



606 - 34